

Indo group honors Garrett Yee as Citizen of the Year

by Wes Bowers

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Leadership, dedication to his country and giving back to his community are just some of the qualities that earned Garrett Yee a Citizen of the Year honor from the **Indo American Community Federation this year.**

Yee, along with Dr. Anmol Mahal and a host of others, will be honored at the group's sixth annual Unity Dinner March 23 at the Newark Hilton.

Jeevan Zutshi, Indo American Community Federation founder and chief executive, said Yee was chosen because of the many positions he holds among the community.

"He was in Iraq recently," Zutshi said. "And he was able to keep a balance between his trusteeship, family and public service while he was there."

Yee was elected for a second term to the Ohlone College Board of Trustees in November, despite announcing months earlier he would be stationed in Iraq.

Zutshi said the regular e-mails from Yee demonstrated more dedication than anyone normally would have done if they had remained in Fremont.

"He's a very fine young man," Zutshi added. "He has always demonstrated excellent leadership qualities and has promoted diversity as much as he can."

Yee said the Unity Dinner was established partially in response to the events on Sept. 11, 2001. He said after serving in both Afghanistan and Iraq, he feels even more of a connection to the Unity Dinner.

While he was in Iraq, he met a fellow serviceman who worked in the World Trade Center building and was pronounced dead while he was caught in the rubble. He too was in the Army reserves and ended up forfeiting lifelong disability pay to serve his country in Iraq.

"It's an interesting connection there between 9-11 and me being honored in part because of my military service," Yee said.

Zutshi also said Yee's own organization, Citizens for a Better Community, has been a longtime supporter of the IACF.

Citizens for a Better Community, or CBC, was established in 1992 and Yee was president from 2000 to 2002, and is now a board member.

The organization was formed for the betterment of Chinese-Americans and the community at large.

"Because of the incredible diversity in our area, there's a need for information, there's a need for services and there's a need to communicate," Yee said. "The best way to achieve a lot of that is to get people involved and get them onto local non-profit boards and public boards and commissions. Working together to get people involved is the way you help the whole community."

Zutshi said the IACF was honoring Dr. Mahal, because he is dedicated to promoting peace and harmony in Fremont. Mahal is director of the California Medical Association.

Also to be honored by the IACF will be Cathy Howard and Sandi Soliday for their dedication and commitment to education; business entrepreneur Roger Bakshi; Gaby Machuca, owner of Burrito Loco; and Gary Robinson of The Saddle Rack.

"I'm really grateful that I've been selected and a lot of other outstanding people are being recognized that night," Yee said. "I think I'm in good company."